



# **Paid Parental Leave Program**

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Employees**

The City of Seattle is excited to offer paid parental leave (PPL) to eligible employees who are new parents. The City's current PPL benefit of up to four weeks of paid leave is being expanded to up to twelve weeks of paid leave for employees to bond with and care for their new child during the first year after a child's birth or placement. The expanded benefit applies to births and new placements occurring on or after January 1, 2017. The birth or placement of a child with the employee for adoption, foster care, or legal guardianship are all qualifying events for paid parental leave.

Please read the FAQs below for employees. If you have additional questions or want to start the application process, please contact your department's human resources representative. Additional resources are available online at the [Paid Parental Leave Program webpage](#), or contact Shauna Fitzner in the Seattle Department of Human Resources at [shauna.fitzner@seattle.gov](mailto:shauna.fitzner@seattle.gov).

### **Eligibility**

- 1) Q. Who is eligible for the expanded PPL leave benefit?**

A. You are eligible if:

  - You have experienced a qualifying event on or after January 1, 2017, and
  - You have been employed in a regularly appointed position and/or temporary benefits-eligible assignment for a total period of at least six consecutive months immediately preceding the date on which you wish to start PPL. The period of six consecutive months begins from the most recent date you became eligible for benefits, regardless of temporary, regular, full-time or part-time status.
- 2) Q. What are qualifying events for PPL?**

A. The birth of your child or the placement of a child in your home for foster care, adoption, or legal guardianship are qualifying events for PPL. The child may be your child or your spouse's or domestic partner's child.
- 3) Q. How long after the qualifying event would I be eligible to use PPL?**

A. You must use the leave by the first anniversary (12 months) of your child's birth or placement. Leave not used within 12 months of the qualifying event will be forfeited.
- 4) Q. Am I eligible for PPL for the birth or placement of my child that occurred before the legislation becomes effective?**

A. An employee is eligible for *four weeks* of PPL for a birth or placement under the PPL benefit that became effective on May 17, 2015. To receive the twelve weeks of leave, the qualifying event must have taken place on January 1, 2017 or later.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> If your qualifying event took place after May 17, 2015 but before January 1, 2017, refer to the PPL FAQs dated May 18, 2015 for more information about your PPL benefit.

- 5) **Q. What does “placement” with a child for adoption, foster care, or legal guardianship mean?**  
A. Placement for adoption, foster care or legal guardianship is the act of physically housing a child for care by the employee in the employee’s home for the first time. Finalizing the adoption is a separate legal process that need not be achieved prior to using the leave. An employee may receive the PPL benefit once per child (an employee does not receive the benefit upon placement and then again after the adoption has become final).
- 6) **Q. How often can I be eligible for PPL?**  
A. An employee is eligible for up to twelve weeks (480 hours, prorated for part-time employees) of PPL once in a single 12-month period in which a qualifying event occurs. A single 12-month period is measured as 12 months from the initial qualifying event. For example, if you received placement of your child for adoption on January 1, 2018, your entitlement to take up to twelve weeks of PPL expires as of January 1, 2019. If you experience another qualifying event, you would not be entitled to take PPL to care for the second child until on or after January 1, 2019 (see also FAQ #12 below).
- 7) **Q. If I and my spouse/domestic partner both work for the City and we have a new child, are we each eligible to take the full amount of PPL?**  
A. Yes, if you and your spouse or domestic partner both work for the City and experience a qualifying event such as birth or placement of your child in your home, each of you is eligible to take up to the full twelve weeks of PPL. The legislation does not prohibit the use of leave by both spouses/domestic partners who work for the City of Seattle.

#### **Amount of Leave**

- 8) **Q. How much PPL is available if I’m eligible?**  
A. Each full-time eligible employee is entitled to take up to twelve weeks or 480 hours per a single 12-month period following the qualifying event. Full-time employees on alternative work schedules (compressed work weeks) are also eligible for 480 hours per a single 12-month period. PPL is pro-rated for part-time employees (see FAQ #11). The number of hours of PPL loaded into an eligible employee leave account depends on how much sick and vacation leave the employee has at the time of the qualifying event.
- Once the PPL application has been approved, the City will load eight weeks of new paid parental leave into an employee’s paid leave account regardless of the employee’s existing paid leave balances. Additionally, the City will supplement the employee’s leave balances in excess of one week of vacation leave and two weeks of sick leave so that the total combined sick, vacation and PPL to bond with a new child equals twelve weeks (see examples in FAQ #9).
- 9) **Q. When and how is the City’s supplemental four weeks of PPL determined?**  
A. The City will determine the amount of supplemental leave to be provided based on the available amount of vacation and sick leave on the date of the qualifying birth or placement.

**Example #1:** A full-time eligible employee has one week (40 hours) of sick leave and two weeks (80 hours) of vacation leave on the date of the child's birth. The employee does not have to count one week (40 hours) of sick leave and one week (40 hours) of vacation towards the PPL benefit. The remaining one week (40 hours) of vacation leave combined with the eight weeks (320 hours) of paid parental leave bring the employee up to nine weeks (360 hours) of paid leave which may be used for bonding with his or her child. In this example, the City will supplement the employee with three additional weeks (120 hours) of paid parental leave to bring the employee's total balance to twelve weeks (480 hours) of paid leave available to the employee for leave to care with his/her newborn. The employee is not required to use vacation leave or sick leave before using some or all of the nine weeks of PPL to care for the newborn.

<i>City-provided eight weeks of PPL</i>	<i>320 hours</i>
Employee available vacation and sick leave	120 hours
- Employee vacation exclusion	(40) hours
- <u>Employee sick leave exclusion</u>	<u>(40) hours</u>
<i>Net employee vacation and sick leave</i>	<i>40 hours</i>
 PPL and vacation/sick leave total (320+40)	 360 hours
 <i>City PPL supplement (480 hours – 360 hours)</i>	 <i>120 hours</i>
 Total paid leave for bonding with new child (360+120)	 480 hours

**Example #2.** In another example, a full-time employee has six weeks (240 hours) of vacation leave and six weeks (240 hours) of sick leave on the date of the child's adoption placement. After excluding the allowable vacation and sick leave, the employee's total paid parental and sick and vacation leave balances exceed twelve weeks. The employee would not receive any supplemental leave from the City beyond the eight weeks of paid parental leave, but when taken with the employee's available sick and vacation leave balances, will have access to more than twelve weeks of paid leave for bonding with a new child.

<i>City provided eight weeks of PPL</i>	<i>320 hours</i>
Employee available vacation and sick leave	480 hours
- Employee vacation exclusion	(40) hours
- <u>Employee sick leave exclusion</u>	<u>(80) hours</u>
<i>Net employee vacation and sick leave</i>	<i>360 hours</i>
 PPL and vacation/sick leave total	 680 hours
 <i>City PPL supplement</i>	 <i>0 hours</i>

No additional City PPL supplemented; 480 hours (12 weeks) is reached using eight weeks (320 hours) of City PPL and four weeks (160 hours) of employee's sick and vacation leave.

**Example #3.** A full-time employee has five hours of vacation and ten hours of sick leave on the date of the child's foster placement. In this scenario,

the employee would be given the full supplement of four weeks (160 hours) of paid leave by the City, which, when combined with the initial eight weeks of leave, will give the employee access to a total of twelve weeks of paid leave for caring for a new child.

<i>City provided eight weeks of PPL</i>	<i>320 hours</i>
Employee's available vacation and sick leave	15 hours
- <u>Employee's vacation and sick leave exclusion</u>	<u>N/A</u>
<i>Net employee vacation and sick leave</i>	<i>00 hours</i>
PPL and vacation/sick leave total	320 hours
<i>City PPL supplement (0 hours &lt; 160 hours)</i>	<i>160 hours</i>
Total paid leave for bonding with new child	480 hours

**10) Q. Why is the City counting employees' accrued paid vacation and sick leave towards the PPL benefit?**

A. The City considered many options for expanding the paid parental leave benefit. While cost was a factor, it was also important to the City that all eligible employees, regardless of time with the City or use of leave for other reasons, could access up to at least twelve weeks (or pro-rated for part of paid time to care for a new child. This model best met the City's intent to provide a fiscally responsible and equitable benefit for all City employees.

**11) Q. I'm a part-time employee. Is PPL pro-rated for part-time employees?**

A. Yes, PPL provided to eligible employees is pro-rated for part-time employees. The vacation and sick leave exclusions used for calculating supplemental leave is also pro-rated for part-time employees.

If the employee works a fluctuating schedule, the amount of leave credited to the employee is based on the average straight-time hours worked during the preceding 12 months. For example, if an employee worked 1,040 hours in the 12 months preceding the leave (0.5 FTE), the 320 hours (eight weeks) would be prorated to 160 hours of PPL. If, after excluding the allowable vacation and sick leave, the employee is eligible for the supplemental PPL, that amount is also pro-rated to the employee's FTE.

The same FTE pro-rating will be applied to vacation and sick leave balance exclusions when calculating the (up to four weeks) supplemental PPL. In the example of a 0.5 FTE employee, the employee could exclude 20 hours of vacation leave and 40 hours of sick leave from the leave used in the supplemental calculation.

**12) Q. If I have two qualifying events during a single 12-month period, how much leave could I use?**

A. If you have two qualifying events during a single 12-month period, you may only use twelve weeks of PPL once in a single 12-month period, assuming you are an eligible employee. You may use that leave to bond with your children from multiple qualifying events. However, you would not be eligible for an additional twelve weeks of leave until after the first 12-month period and only until the

expiration of 12 months from the second qualifying event. Twins born or siblings placed on the same day are considered a single qualifying event.

Using the example provided in FAQ #6, if a child is placed for adoption on January 1, 2017 and then the employee gives birth to a child on July 1, 2017, she is eligible for twelve weeks of leave between January 1, 2017 through December 31, 2017. However, the employee would qualify for an additional twelve weeks of leave on January 1, 2018 for the birth of her second child. The employee must use that leave before July 1, 2018, the first birthday of her second child.

## **Use of Leave**

**13) Q. If I am approved for PPL, may I use the leave intermittently?**

A. According to the ordinance, PPL is not to be taken intermittently or on a reduced schedule, unless the employee and City mutually agree. If you desire to take PPL intermittently or on a reduced schedule, please talk with your department's HR representative.

**14) Q. If my department agrees to an intermittent schedule for the use of PPL, in what increments may I take the leave?**

A. Departments have discretion over your intermittent schedule for the use of PPL.

**15) Q. Can I use PPL in the stages of preparation for adoption such as required travel/visitation to another country?**

A. The employee can only use PPL once the child has been placed in the home. PPL may not be used for the stages of preparation for the placement of a child. However, the employee may be entitled to use other paid or unpaid leave for this purpose. Please consult with your department's HR representative.

## **Documentation**

**16) Q. If I am approved for PPL, will I be required to document my eligibility for the leave?**

A. Yes, in order to be approved to take PPL, you will be required to provide certain documents for the leave. Personnel Rules are being developed regarding acceptable documentation. In the meantime, departments will request reasonable documentation that substantiates the use of paid parental leave before authorizing PPL. Birth certificates, court orders or other documentation that substantiates placement of a child with you are considered reasonable documentation.

## **Return to Work**

**17) Q. Am I expected to return to work after PPL ends?**

A. PPL is not intended to be used immediately prior to a retirement, resignation, or separation. However, after you exhaust your approved PFCL leave hours, you may be eligible to use other paid and/or unpaid leaves available to you that would extend your leave from work.

**18) Q. If I don't return to work after using PPL (as well as associated sick leave, Family Medical Leave (FML), etc.) would the City recover the value of the leave?**

A. Yes, if an employee fails to return to work after using PPL and there is no qualifying reason to warrant additional leave time, you may be required to reimburse the City for amount equal to the value of the PPL leave you took.

### **Interaction with Other Leaves**

**19) Q. Does the PPL run concurrent with FML? Must PPL be designated as FML and count against my FML benefit?**

A. You may use PPL in addition to available, unpaid FML leave. You could choose to have the PPL designated as FML, but PPL has the same job protections as FML. (Library employees need to verify this FAQ question with the Library's Leave Coordinator. The FML benefit at the Library is different than with the City of Seattle and leaves may run concurrently.)

**20) Q. Does PPL provide me with job protection?**

A. Yes, your job is protected while on PPL in a similar manner to the City's FML program.

**21) Q. How does PPL interact with donated sick leave?**

A. Donated sick leave may only be used for an employee's own personal illness, injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition, includes recovery from childbirth. Donated sick leave cannot be use to care for or bond with a new child.(see Sick Leave Transfer Program in Personnel Rule 7.7).

### **Health Care Benefits**

**22) Q. How does PPL interact with my healthcare benefits?**

A. You will maintain your City healthcare coverage provided you report at least 80 hours of paid time or unpaid FML in a month or meet other healthcare criteria.

**23) Q. If I am approved for PPL due to the placement of a child in my home for foster care, will my child be covered on the City's health care plans?**

A. Placement of a child for foster care in your home does not qualify the child for coverage on the City's health care plans. In order for the child to be covered on the City's plans, you must be awarded legal custody or guardianship of the child and enroll the child into a City health care plan. Please contact your department's HR representative for more information.

### **Pay and Time Sheet Completion**

**24) Q. How would I get paid if I'm approved for PPL? Will there be a new pay code created to use on time sheets?**

A. Employees will receive the straight-time rate of pay that they would receive for other paid leave (i.e., vacation or holidays). The pay code for use of PPL on your time sheet is PT. Your department will load your eligible hours for leave use after

you have submitted your application for PPL, to be used on or after the date of the qualifying event.

### **Retroactive Pay for PPL (“Retro”)**

**25) Q. What is PPL Retro?**

A. Legislation authorizing additional PPL was signed on February 17, 2017 and may only be implemented after a 30 day waiting period (effective March 19, 2017). The legislation authorizes the benefits to apply to qualifying events occurring on or after January 1, 2017. Since we cannot put the new benefit in place until the legislation process has completed, employees with a qualifying event will be eligible to have their hours adjusted to take advantage of the new PPL benefit. Please talk to your department’s leave coordinator if you wish to use PPL Retro.

**26)Q. Who is eligible for PPL Retro?**

A. You may be entitled to use PPL retro if you are an eligible employee who experienced a qualifying PPL event on or after January 1, 2017 and, prior to March 19, 2017 you used paid or unpaid leave for time off to care for or bond with a newborn or newly placed child. The same eligibility requirements as stated in FAQ #1 must be met for employees to be eligible.

**27) Q. How do I apply for Retro PPL? Is it automatic?**

A. Contact your department Leave Coordinator to discuss your schedule and eligibility requirements, calculate your new PPL benefit, review your payroll data for hours used from your eligibility date and determine if and how you would like your previous hours adjusted. You may be required to present documentation to establish your entitlement to PPL Retro. Your department Leave Coordinator will work with payroll to make applicable adjustments.

**28) Q. I have already taken eight weeks off after my qualifying event on January 5, 2017. I used a combination of my four weeks of PPL from the previous City PPL benefit, vacation, sick leave and went without pay as family medical leave for bonding. What adjustments do I get?**

A. If you were an eligible employee as of January 5, 2017, then you are entitled to take up to 12 weeks of PPL between January 5, 2017 and January 5, 2018. You may have all or part of the vacation, sick leave and time without pay retroactively designated as PPL, and get paid retroactively accordingly. Or you can choose to not invoke any adjustments and leave your time as it was used and then you may be entitled to take your PPL before the one year anniversary of your qualifying event. It is important to work with your department leave coordinator, as every employee’s situation is different.

**29)Q. I have taken intermittent sick leave and vacation since my qualifying event on February 2, 2017, but I have not applied for PPL yet. Can I have those hours retroactively designated as PPL?**

A. PPL hours are for caring for and bonding with a newborn or newly placed child. If you were an eligible employee as of the date you wish to use PPL Retro and were approved to take intermittent leave, your hours may be retroactively designated PPL if the time was for care-taking and bonding and you submit the proper documentation to your department Leave Coordinator.

**30) Q. What if as of March 10, 2017, I have already used my four-week benefit along with all of my vacation and sick leave, and went without pay as family medical leave for bonding? Do I need to or am I required to have retro adjustments? Can I use my PPL benefit going forward?**

A. You are not required to have adjustments made to your previous paid or unpaid leave hours. However, it may benefit you to do so. Benefits for PPL must be used within one year of the qualifying event date. Contact your department Leave Coordinator to help calculate your benefit, review possible retro transactions, and schedule your remaining PPL leave usage.